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SUBJECT: (SBU) POLITICAL ROUNDTABLE BRINGS PARTIES TOGETHER IN SALAH
AD DIN PROVINCE

(U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Not for distribution by internet.

11. (U) This is a SET Tikrit cable.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY. Several political parties in Salah Ad Din Province meet weekly to develop political cohesiveness in the province. The group is showing an amazing unity of purpose during its first two months in existence. END SUMMARY.

(U) BACKGROUND

13. (SBU) On January 24, 2006, the Political Roundtable of Salah Ad Din Province met in Tikrit. This committee began in November 2005 as a place for political entities in Salah Ad Din to work together to find common ground and discuss differences. The SET and Provincial Governor's spokesman developed the concept, and the spokesman contacted the 37 political entities to seek their participation. After a bumpy start, the committee seems to be gaining momentum.

14. (SBU) Although all 37 groups were invited, about 12 are consistent attendees. The Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and the Iraqi Turcoman Front (ITF) offer the most opinions. However, groups representing Shia Arabs, Kurds, and Christians also attend and participate.

(U) PROGRESS

15. (SBU) At the January 24 meeting, the group elected a president and secretary from among those nominated or self-nominated. The new roundtable president is not a party member, but the Dean of the Tikrit University Law School. Dr. Amer has been at the university for over 15 years, and was the acting roundtable leader for the first two months. (COMMENT: it was hard to tell if he was elected because of what he could bring to the group, or because he had stepped forward in the beginning to lead the group and had not stepped on many toes during the first months. END COMMENT.)

16. (SBU) This meeting focused on the national government and the future provincial council elections. Other than selecting the president, the group took only one vote, and the outcome was unanimous: to support the incoming government. (COMMENT: With the variety of people in the room, this was no small task. END COMMENT).

17. (SBU) A Christian man (no further info) said he felt that Christians will be overwhelmed in the national Council of Representatives. Several people in the group disagreed, saying

the individual is important and can make a difference. This moved the discussion to the provincial elections, where most in the room agreed they should set up a unified list to ensure fairness in the new provincial council. These discussions led to a few minutes of patriotism, with everyone hoping for one Iraq, and discussing the need to take the corruption out of the provincial council. They want a council that works for the average citizen, not for council members themselves.

18. (SBU) The discussion of a unified list took on great importance. The discussions were about how to divide the seats, and what type of people each party should nominate, including one suggestion to offer slots to national election-nominees who were not selected. Then, as the discussion turned to tribes, the group realized they would need to educate voters, so that there would be less reliance on tribal leadership as the sole vote influencer.

(U) COMMENT

19. (SBU) This committee is taking an interesting turn. Where SET expected to see sharp divisions develop early, the groups are in fact working together. They do voice some different opinions; however, their vision of a coalition list seems like a sophisticated approach to the problem of corruption in the current provincial council. They feel that this approach will have more transparency than might otherwise be seen. On the other hand, so far nothing controversial has come to the committee, so there has not been a major disagreement. As the provincial council elections approach and the group needs to stand together in public to show unity, there may be some breaking of the ranks. The mood among the political leaders is that of a cooperative public forum, but it remains to be seen

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whether their constituents will support this type of consensus.
BELL